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ABSTRACT

Offered in response to the broad appeal of Charles Dickens's performance career to various disciplines, this annotated bibliography lists 40 resources concerned with Dickens's success as a performer interpreting his literary works. The resources are categorized under books, theses and dissertations, articles in scholarly journals, nineteenth century newspaper reviews, letters to the editor, and bibliographies. (RL)

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The Performance Career of Charles Dickens

An Annotated Bibliography

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August 1981

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
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The history of Dickens' performance career appeals to various disciplines. To the students and scholars of English literature, it shows another and much less known side of England's most famous novelist. For them it also proves an interesting study on the stage's influence on Dickens' writing.

Historians can view Dickens' great success as a performer as a cultural phenomenon of 19th century England and America. Indeed, the rush at the box office, the American welcomes, and the wild demand for tickets, all give insight into Victorian society.

For the students and scholars of oral interpretation and theatre, Charles Dickens' performance career marks an important development in the one-man show as well as providing an inspiring example of dedication to the art of oral reading.

Books

Collins, Philip, ed. The Public Readings / Charles Dickens. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.

A complete edition of the scripts used by Dickens for the Readings. The 64 page introduction includes much background information about Dickens' performances and the Victorian practice of platform readings.

Dickens, Charles. Sikes and Nancy: A Reading. New York: H. Sotheron, 1921.

Dickens' script for the controversial Reading of the murder sequence from Oliver Twist.

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Dickens, Mamie. My Father as I Recall Him. Westminster: Roxburghe Press, n.d.

Miss Dickens' book gives insight into Dickens' rehearsal practices and his decision to tour America. Written with much filial affection, the book is particularly noteworthy for its point of view.

Dickens, Sir Henry F. Memories of My Father. London: Victor Gollancz, 1928.

The intention of this book is not that of a biography but rather a collection of memories of life with Dickens as father. Written in a conversational tone, the book is filled with a sense of love for the subject. Like Mamie Dickens' work, this book's most noteworthy feature is its point of view.

Dolby, George. Charles Dickens as I Knew Him: The Story of the Reading Tours in Great Britain and America, 1866-1870. London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1885.

The title says it all. An account of the Reading Tours 1866-1870 written by Dickens' manager and personal friend. Since this is a first hand account, its perspective makes it invaluable. (An interesting detail found in this book: Dickens wanted to tour Australia with his Readings.)

Field, Kate. Pen Photographs of Charles Dickens's Readings. Boston: James R. Osgood & Co., 1871.

A detailed description of Dickens' performance style. As the title suggests, the aim of the work is to reconstruct in writing Dickens' performances and the audience response as the author experienced them. Includes accounts of his arrivals in Boston and New York containing several humorous ancedotes (e.g. the experience of waiting on line at the box office). The reader becomes a witness of Dickens performances through the eyes of Kate Field. One flaw: this book is often qualified as being a tribute by an enthusiastic admirer rather than the work of an objective critic.

Fitz-Gerald, S. J. Adair. Dickens and the Drama. London: Chapman & Hall, Ltd., 1910.

Dickens' connection with the theatre: his early days as an amateur actor and his performances on the stage in later life as an actor (as opposed to a reader). Includes information on the stage versions of his novels.

Fitzsimons, Raymond. Garish Lights: The Public Reading Tours of Charles Dickens. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1970.

A recent account of the experience of Dickens on the road: a study of the Reading Tours. A true retrospective, this book is able to draw upon the various, less objective texts written by Dickens' associates in his lifetime or shortly after his death. The author believes that Dickens was "driven" to the public platform as a means of escape from his brooding depressions over the dissolution of his marriage, his failing literary powers, the separation from his sons, and the approach of old age.

Forster, John. The Life of Charles Dickens. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899.

This massive work was written by a personal friend of Dickens who was chosen by Dickens himself as his biographer. The index includes subject references, a boon to anyone interested in locating information about a particular event. This is the most authorative of the biographies and the most often cited in other works.

Kent, Charles. Charles Dickens as a Reader. 1872; rpt. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1971.

Written by a personal admirer of Dickens, this book holds the same stigma as the Kate Field book: that of not truly being the work of an objective critic. Still, the book contains much valuable information.

MacKenzie, R. Shelton. The Life of Charles Dickens. Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson & Bros., 1870.

A good biography written shortly after Dickens' death. It contains speeches made by Dickens on various occasions, including his performances.

Pemberton, T. Edgar. Charles Dickens and the Stage. London: George Redway, 1888.

Dickens' relationship to the theatre throughout his life. Includes chapters on the stage as mentioned in Dickens' writings, speeches, and letters as well as chapters devoted to his performances as an actor.

Van Amerongen, J. B. The Actor in Dickens. New York: Appleton & Co., 1927.

Subtitled: "A Study of the Histrionic and Dramatic Elements in the Novelist's Life and Works." The influence of the theatre in Dickens' personal life and his writings. Contains a chapter on the Readings.

Williams, Emlyn. Readings from Dickens. London: Folio Society, 1953.

Adaptations by Williams used for his own impersonations of Dickens on the Platform. The adaptations would be a helpful guide to the solo performer wishing to prepare a selection from Dickens. The short introduction offers limited information on Dickens' performance career.

Theses and Dissertations

Hipps, Donna Carol. "Charles Dickens as an Oral Interpreter." M. A. thesis Univ. of North Carolina at Chapel Hill 1975.

The thesis examines biographical data pertaining to the Reading Tours and continues with a description of Dickens as an oral interpreter. Includes a chamber theatre adaptation of David Copperfield.

Low, Donald R. "The Speeches, Lectures, and Readings of Charles Dickens and William M. Thackeray in the United States, 1842-1868." Diss. Northwestern Univ. 1956.

A detailed historical study of the American tours of the two British authors concerned primarily with dates and places. The focus is on what was said where rather than on the methods or techniques used by the two novelists in their public appearances

Stephens, Ruby Jo. "Charles Dickens--Oral Reader." M. A. thesis Univ. of Oklahoma 1942.

The study is divided into four sections: 1) Background information on the Victorian Age. 2) Biographical data on the Readings Tours. 3) Dickens' performances according to his contemporaries. 4) A re-evaluation of the Readings through the application of "recent" (i.e. 1942) criteria.

Time has marred this thesis: the "recent criteria" is now quite out of date. While the first three sections are still valid, the last section remains of interest in its historical context.

Stone, Harry. "Dickens's Reading." Diss. Univ. of California at Los Angeles 1955.

The title can be misleading: this dissertation has nothing to do with Dickens' *Readings* but rather is concerned with Dickens' *Library* (note singular "Reading"). The authors who influenced Dickens' writing.

Scholarly Articles

Collins, Philip. "Dickens's Public Readings: The Kit and the Team." Dickensian, 74 (January 1978), 8-16.

A history of Dickens' stage equipment from the days of his charity readings through the years of his professional Reading Tours. Also includes information about the staff which accompanied Dickens on the road.

Murphy, Theresa and Richard Murphy. "Charles Dickens as Professional Reader." Quarterly Journal of Speech, XXXIII (October 1947). 299-307.

A reappraisal of Dickens as platform performer through the application of letters and other materials just then made available.

Murphy, Theresa. "Interpretation in the Dickens Period." Quarterly Journal of Speech, XLI (October 1955), 243-9.

Elocution and platform performance in the "Dickens Period" (1850-1875).

19th Century Newspaper Reviews

"Charles Dickens' Fourth Reading." New York Tribune, 14 Dec. 1867, p. 4, col. 6.

Discusses Dickens' polished performance style and vocal characteristics.

"Charles Dickens: His Second Reading." New York Tribune, 11 Dec. 1867, p. 4, col. 6.

Notable for mention of Dickens' characterizations in performance.

"Charles Dickens: The Story of Little Dombey and the Trial from Pickwick." New York Herald, 14 Dec. 1867, p. 4, col. 6.

Notes Dickens' use of gesture in the Readings.

"Dickens' Readings: Fifth Night." New York Herald. 17 Dec. 1867, p. 5, col. 4.

Notable for its belief that Dickens "is a better actor than elocutionist."

"Mr. Charles Dickens: His First Reading in Boston--A Cordial Welcome and a Complete Success." New York Times. 3 Dec. 1867, p. 8, col. 2.

Dickens' first Reading in America and its reception. It documents Dickens use of memorization in performance: he did not confine himself to the printed page but spoke from memory.

"Mr. Dickens as a Reader." New York Times, 16 Dec. 1867, p. 5, cols. 1-2.

A rare negative review of Dickens' performances. The reviewer believes that "to recite *properly* is quite as difficult as to write well . . . It rarely happens that a man can do two things equally well. We are of the opinion that Mr. Dickens forms no exception to the rule." Even more remarkable is the reviewer's statement that "the lecture room is nothing but a shambling remnant of a prosy past, and readings as a rule show either the disinclination or incapacity of an audience to read for itself."

"Mr. Dickens' Farewell Reading." New York Times, 21 April 1868, p. 4, col. 7.

The "perfect success" of Dickens' Farewell Readings in New York. The article explains that Dickens was at the time performing under the duress of a severe head cold.

"Mr. Dickens' First Reading." New York Times, 10 Dec. 1867, p. 5, cols. 2-3.

Dickens first Reading in New York and its reception. The enthusiastic reviewer gives a detailed account of Dickens' gestures in performance as well as vocal techniques. Also noteworthy is the statement that "Mr. Dickens fully proves in these readings the truth of what has often been said: that he is one of the best of living actors. . . . He played in succession several characters--all comic, and among them his own *Sairey Gamp*--and we certainly have rarely, if ever, seen comic acting equal to it. It was easy, graceful, never overdone or overdrawn; and its effect was irresistible."

"Mr. Dickens in Boston--The Eager Demand for Tickets." New York Times, 20 Nov. 1867, p. 1, col. 7.

An account of Dickens' arrival in America for the Readings and the great demand for tickets.

"Mr. Dickens' Third Reading." New York Tribune, 13 Dec. 1867, p. 4, cols. 5-6.

Dickens' Readingson a night of a blizzard. Describes in detail Dickens' use of vocal techniques and includes a comparison between Dickens and prominent elocutionists of the day. Also, the article compares the Boston audiences to those in New York.

Letters to the Editor

"Mr. Dickens's Readings." Swindled. Letter. New York Tribune, 13 Dec. 1867, p. 4, col. 6.

(See annotation after the following letter.)

"The Tickets for Dickens's Readings." F. R. B. New York Tribune, 13 Dec. 1867, p. 4, col. 6.

These letters express patron disgust over the manner of ticket sale for Dickens' Readings. George Dolby, as Dickens' manager, had the tickets sold for the seats in the rear of the auditorium first (in the hope of discouraging speculators). The plan, however, resulted in honest patrons(i.e. Swindled and F. R. B.), who got up very early to be among the first in line, being rewarded with the worst seats in the house.

"Mr. Dickens's Readings." George Dolby. Letter. New York Tribune, 14 Dec. 1867, p. 4, col. 5.

George Dolby's explanation and apology to the patrons.

Bibliographies

Carr, Sister Lucile. A Catalogue of the VanderPoel Dickens Collection at the University of Texas. Austin, Texas: Texas Univ. Humanities Research Center, 1968.

Bibliography of the "new" (1968) Dickens acquisitions at Austin. Includes many unique, first editions.

Churchill, R. C. A Bibliography of Dickensian Criticism, 1836-1975. New York: Garland Publ. Inc., 1975.

Excellent index: criticism is subdivided into sections labelled by topic (including one on "Stage and Platform").

Fenstermaker, John J. Charles Dickens, 1940-1975: An Analytical Subject Index to Periodical Criticism of the Novels and Christmas Books. Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1979.

Criticism on the novels and the Christmas books written between 1940-1975.

Gold, Joseph. The Stature of Dickens: A Centenary Bibliography. Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1971.

Considers itself "not a definitive listing" for it omits any "peripheral, occasional, and ephemeral items." It includes books, essays, and articles on Dickens. Also includes reviews and criticism.

Kitton, Fred G. Dickensiana: A Bibliography of the Literature Relating to Charles Dickens and His Writings. New York: Haskell House Publ., Ltd., 1971.

Bibliography of all writings relating to Dickens, whether biographical or literary criticism.

Miller, William. The Dickens Student and Collector. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1946.

Notable for its bibliographical information on the dramatic and musical stage adaptations based on Dickens' works.